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ABSTRACT

Two groups of parents (N=300) with children enrolled in either private nursery schools or public day care centers were surveyed to determine their attitudes and needs in regard to parent involvement programs. A 46% rate of response was received. Of those responding, 98% favored such programs, at least as far as parent discussion groups were concerned. Approximately 45% said that they would like to be more actively involved and suggested a variety of ways in which they could work with children in the classroom. It was also found that parents were generally in agreement with the goals of the preschool programs in which their children were enrolled. There were some significant differences between the two sets of parents in regard to their primary reason for sending their child to the preschool, and their particular needs for new knowledge and skills for child rearing. (Author/MP)

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PARENTS' VIEW of PARENT INVOLVEMENT in EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Ajit K. Das

Parent involvement in educational programs for young children has emerged as an important theme in the professional and popular literature on Early Childhood Education during the last few years. Almost all of the recent text books in the field contain a chapter titled "Working with Parents," "Inolving Parents" or "Communicating with Parents." A number of special publications on the subject has been issued by professional organizations in the field of Early Childhood Education (Lane 1979, Honig 1978). Experimental programs in Early Childhood Education, sponsored by the government have also given much attention to parent involement, and suggested various roles for parents. Federal Interagency Regulations for child care centers mandate parent involvement at all levels.

The concept of parent involvement has received a great deal of close and careful scrutiny. The various roles that parents actually perform, or can assume, given the opportunity, have been discussed. Thus Hess (1974) has pointed out that parents may be involved in Early Childhood Education programs in the following roles: (i) as supporters, service givers and facilitators, (ii) as learners, (iii) as teachers of their own children, (iv) as volunteers and teachers aides in the classroom, and (v) as policy makers and partners.

Some of the roles mentioned above are well established. Traditionally, parents have provided a wide variety of services (from fixing up broken equipment to fund raising) which has made it possible for the teachers to concentrate on more central tasks of curriculum planning, teaching and evaluating learning. The role of the parent as a learner also has a long history. Educational Programs for young children have historically tried to instruct parents in different aspects of child care. Even today, parent education is an important goal in the majority of parent involvement programs. The roles of the parent as a teacher of her own child and as a volunteer or paid teacher's aid in the classrooms are of more recent origin.

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These roles have evolved out of experimental programs for disadvantaged children, and are based on the premise that involving the parent in a teaching role not only brings a more powerful influence to bear on the child, but also enhances the self esteem and sense of competence of the parent. As an early intervention strategy, involving the parent in the education of his own child has proven to be more effective than providing center-based programs to groups of children, or home-based tutoring programs to individual children, which do not involve the parent in a central role. The role of the parent as policy maker and partner is also a relatively new role. This role has also evolved out of experimental programs for disadvantaged children. The rationale for this role is based on the idea of people's constitutional right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. It is aimed at enhancing the power of self determination for people who have been historically excluded from the political process. Another assumption underlying this role is that parents know the needs of their children best, and, therefore are in the best position to plan, in partnership with teachers, the kinds of educational experiences that their children need most.

In planning for parent involvement in a particular child care program, we should take into consideration such factors as program goals, developmental needs of children, our assumptions about parents and children, cultural and ethnic factors, and parent attitudes and interest toward involvement in the program.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the present study was to find answers to the following questions:

1. What value, if any, do parents perceive in becoming involved in Early Education programs in which their children are enrolled?
2. To what extent are parents willing and able to become involved in some aspect of these programs?
3. What specific contributions can they make to Early Childhood Education programs?

4. What specific needs do parents express for their own development as parents and as persons.

5. What expectations do parents have of Educational programs for young children?

6. To what extent do parent's expectations match the commonly accepted goals of Early Childhood Education?

7. Are there any significant differences between parents whose children attend Private Nursery School program and those whose children attend public Day Care Centers in regard to questions 1 through 6.

METHODOLOGY: The basic tool for collecting data was a 50 item questionnaire divided into three major parts. Part I: consisted of fourteen items (4 open ended, and 11 objective) which called for information relating to the parent's general orientation to preschool education and child rearing. Part II: consisted of twenty items (9 open-ended and 19 objective) that tapped parents interests in working with children in the classroom and their needs for experiences which will help them to grow as parents and as persons. Part III: listed seven possible topics for Parent discussion groups. The respondent was asked to pick one or more of these topics. He also had the opportunity to write in a response.

The Sample: A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to the parents of children enrolled in the Nursery School. Seventy of these questionnaires, representing a 47% rate of response, were returned. The same number of questionnaires were distributed to the parents of children enrolled in Public Day Care Centers. The rate of return from day-care parents was roughly the same (45%) as from the Nursery School Parents. In terms of socio-economic status, the two groups were distinct. The majority of Nursery School parents belonged to the middle or upper middle class with a midian income of $30,000 per year. The majority of Day Care Parents belonged to the lower or lower middle class with a medium family income of $17,000 per year.

RESULTS: The major findings of the study are presented below, under each research question.

DO PARENTS WANT TO BE INVOLVED?

First of all it can be said that the majority of parents favor some degree of involvement in the educational programs in which their young children are enrolled. As shown in Table 1, 88% of the Nursery School Parents and 72% of the Day Care Parents favor the formation of parent discussion groups meeting at least once a month to discuss parental concerns about their children.

Table 1

Percentage of Parents Who Favor Parent Groups-

	UNS	SSC	Total
Yes	88	72	80
No	6	6	6
Qualified Yes	3	4	3.5
No Responses	3	18	10.5

$\chi^2 = 162.08$ d.f. = 3 $P < .01$

TO WHAT EXTENT DO PARENTS WANT TO BE INVOLVED:

A sizable number of parents in both groups indicated their willingness to work with children in the classroom. Table 2 gives the actual figures for parents who said "yes" to the question "would you like to work with children in the classroom." The table also gives the figures for parents who gave a qualified yes to the same question. These were parents who said that they would like to work with children in the classroom, but were unable to do so at the particular time on account of other commitments.

Table 2

Percentage of Parents Who Would Like to Work with Children in the Classroom:

	UNS	SSC	Total
Yes	46	45	45.5
No	20	25	22.5
Uncertain	7	1.5	4.5
Qualified Yes	20	9	14.5
No Response	7	20	13.5

$\chi^2 = 48.85$ d.f. = 4 $P < .01$

WHAT SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS CAN PARENTS MAKE TO EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

Parents were asked to provide two kinds of information: (a) the kinds of things that they would like to do in the classroom if they were to come, and (b) any special skill or knowledge that they have and would like to share with the children.

Table 3 summarizes the general interests of parents under common categories. The special skills and knowledge that parents are willing to share with children are presented in Table 4.

Table 3

Kinds of Things That Parents Would Prefer to do in the Classroom

Activity	UNS	SSC
Arts & Crafts	11	8
Reading, Story Telling	2	5
Music, Singing	3	1
Helping Out the Teacher With Anything	9	12
Field Trips	1	1
One to One Help	3	1
Teaching (Foreign Language, Alphabet, Writing, Sign Language, etc.)	3	3
Play Supervision	2	1

As one can readily see from this list, parents are willing to participate in the entire spectrum of preschool activities. As for special skills and knowledge, both groups mentioned a number of interesting ideas under each of the general topic in Table 3. Some examples from the University Nursery School Parents were:

-making Christmas ornaments
-making drums from empty oatmeal boxes
-card and fleece yarn
-photographing children
-teaching about proper nutrition
-preparing different types of food
-teaching French and Russian
-teaching children about health care
-showing children how to brush teeth properly
-arrange a visit to the clinic to see procedures and instruments used in examining children
-arrange a visit to a radio station

Day Care Parents mentioned things like:

-working with dough art
-making cupcakes
-working with macrame
-making cloth puppets
-making stuffed toys & bean bags
-doing a science project on solar energy
-making pottery
-play piano and have children sing or dance

WHAT KINDS OF INFORMATION OR SKILLS DO PARENTS NEED TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE PARENTS OR PEOPLE?

The particular kinds of knowledge and/or skill for which parents expressed a need are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Percentage of Parents Expressing Needs for Different Kinds of Knowledge or Skills.

	UNS			SSC			Total		
	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR
**a. How to Teach My Preschool Child	67	23	10	57	43	-	*62	33	5
b. Whether My Child is Developing Normally	68	23	9	63	37	-	*65.5	30	4.5
c. Services Provided by Community Agencies	48	44	8	63	37	-	73	22.5	4.5
d. How to Communicate with Child	70	21	9	76	24	-	*79	15.5	5
**e. How to Help My Child Interact with Other Children	86	8	6	72	23	4	*71.5	24	4.5
f. How to Discipline My Children	71	20	9	72	28	-	*71.5	24	4.5
g. How to Make Toys & Other Things for Children	53	40	7	57	43	-	55	41.5	3.5
**h. How to Tell Whether My Children Are Progressing in School	73	17	10	65	35	-	*69	26	5
i. What to Do When My Children Do Things I Don't Approve	64	23	13	81	19	-	*72.5	21	6.5

Table 4 (Continued)

Percentage of Parents Expressing Needs for Different Kinds of Knowledge or Skills.

	UWS			SSC			Total		
	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR
j. How to Play With My Children	51	39	10	38	59	3	44.5	49	6.5
k. Where to Take My Children for a Nice Time and Learning	50	36	14	56	41	3	53	38.5	8.5
l. How to Use & Develop My Talents	54	36	10	43	53	4	48.5	44.5	7
m. How to Refrain From Hitting My Child	24	62	14	32	65	3	*28	63.5	8.5
n. How to Guarantee That My Child Will Succeed in School	59	27	14	56	38	6	57.5	32.5	10
o. How to Talk to Teachers	39	47	14	22	73	5	*30.5	60	9.5
p. How to Help My Child Learn a Second Language	54	34	12	53	46	1	53.5	40	6.5
**q. How to Extend Language Learning	71	17	12	55	41	4	*63	28	8
**r. How to Use the Home as a Learning Environment	70	23	7	55	41	4	*62.5	32	5.5

*A significantly larger number of parents ($P < .05$) said "yes" or "no" to these items.

**There was a significant difference ($P < .05$) between nursery school parents and day care parents on these items.

From the information provided in Table 4 it may be seen that the most frequently expressed needs of the parents, center around such concerns as helping one's child to develop social skills, socially acceptable behavior, language competence, general intellectual skills, and being able to tell that one's child is developing normally.

WHAT DO PARENTS EXPECT from PRE-SCHOOL EXPERIENCE?

Parents were asked to give the primary reason for which they enrolled their child in preschool and to indicate the most important thing they expected their child to learn from the preschool experience. Parents' reasons for enrolling their child in preschool are given in Table 5.

Table 5

First reason for Enrolling Child in Preschool - (Percentages)

	UNS	SSC
Socialization (peer interaction) experience with others	44	22
Readiness for school	16	3
Stimulation (intellectual, social and emotional) growth & development	15	14
Structured learning	16	
Play and learn	4	
Guidance, direction, discipline	3	2
Misc. (free time, reputation of school)	2	3
Work	0	41
Own Education	0	15

$\chi^2 = 62.25$ d.f. = 6 $P < .05$

The reasons given by the two groups were substantially different. The majority of Nursery School parents gave child-related reasons such as socialization, school readiness and structured learning, etc. In contrast, the majority of day care

parents gave self-related reasons such as work and education. These differences apparently reflect the different economic circumstances of the two groups rather than any basic differences in philosophy of child rearing or preschool education. This conclusion is supported by the responses given by the two groups of parents to the questions relating to the most important learning that they expect to result from preschool experience. These responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Most important learning expected from preschool (Percentages)

	UNS	SSC
Get along with others	36	34
Desire for learning	10	6
Enjoy other children (caring, sharing sensitivity to others)	21	20
Self acceptance	12	4
School readiness (follow instructions, self-control, discipline)	10	15
Manners	0	7
Number & alphabet	0	4
Individual (self-confidence)	4	3
Responsible behavior	3	3
Misc. (motor skills, tie shoes, etc.)	3	3
Making good decisions	1	1

$\chi^2 = 5.22$ d.f. = 8 $P > .05$

It is clear from Table 6 that these are only minor differences between the two groups in what they regard as the most important effect of preschool education. Social development (learning to get along with others, sensitivity to others, etc.) is seen as the single most important learning by the largest number of parents in both groups. A somewhat smaller number of parents mentioned emotional and motivational

development related to school success, such as, desire for learning, self control, ability to follow instructions, etc.

TO WHAT EXTENT PARENT EXPECTATIONS MATCH PRESCHOOL GOALS?

Parents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the commonly stated goals of preschool education. They were also asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the curricular content and methods used in realizing these goals. Parent responses are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Parent Endorsement of preschool goals
Curriculum Content and Methods: (Percentages)

	UNS			SSC		
	Yes	No	?	Yes	No	?
a. Cultural competence for own culture	94	6*	--	91	8	1
b. Aquaintance & appreciate cultural products (own culture)	97	3*	-	99	-	1
c. Appreciate other cultures	100	-	-	99	-	1
d. Decision making	98.5	-	1.5	97	-	3
e. Learning by active involvement	100	-	-	100	-	-
f. Art & Craft experience	97	1.5	1.5	100	-	-
g. Working together (cooperation)	100	-	-	100	-	-
h. To speak properly	94	-	6	99	-	1

*not exclusively

It is evident from the data in Table 7 that parents overwhelmingly endorse the goals, content and methodology of preschool education as commonly stated.

ARE THERE ANY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS OF PARENTS?

Apart from the major difference in regard to the primary reason given for enrolling one's child in preschool, there were some minor differences between the groups of parents regarding such things as the extent to which they were willing and able to become involved in the parent discussion groups, the kind of information and

skills they needed to become effective parents or persons, their expectations of preschool education. These differences may be summarized as follows:

- A somewhat larger percentage of nursery school parents are willing to become involved in parent discussion groups.
- A larger percentage of nursery school parents want to learn more about such things as how to extend the child's social skills, language competence and general cognitive skills.
- A larger percentage of day care mothers want to learn about dealing with unacceptable behavior, and specific school related learnings, such as the alphabet and numbers.

WHAT TOPICS DO PARENTS WANT TO DISCUSS IN GROUPS

Parents' preference in regard to topics for discussion groups is shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Preference in Regard to Topics for Parent Discussion Groups (percentages*)

	UNS N=70	SSC N=68
Learn More About Preschool Program	46	15
Learn How I Can Get Involved in Preschool	20	6
Find Out More About Certain Aspects of Child Development	38	50
How I Can Foster and Guide My Own Child's Development	64	50
Understand Certain Aspects of Own Child's Behavior	66	62
How Children Influence Parents' Behavior	48	44
Aspects of Family Living	27	32

*Percentages add up to more than 100 because respondents could pick more than one topic.

In addition to the topics listed, parents suggested some other topics such as:

- How to cope with children's fears
- How friends' and neighbors' children influence mine
- Kindergarten readiness
- Advantages and disadvantages of entering school at age 5
- Disciplining children
- Sexual awareness appropriate for preschool children

SUMMARY

A group of 300 parents with children enrolled in a private nursery school and four public Day Care Centers were surveyed to determine their attitudes and needs in regard to parent involvement programs. A forty-six percent rate of response was received. Of those responding, the vast majority (98%) favored such programs, at least as far as parent discussion groups are concerned. Approximately 45 percent said that they would like to be more actively involved and suggested a variety of ways in which they could work with children in the classroom. It was also found that parents were generally in agreement with the goals of the preschool programs in which their children were enrolled. There were some significant differences between the two sets of parents in regard to their primary reason for sending their child to the preschool, and their particular needs for new knowledge and skills for child rearing.

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